



**Civil Rights Commission**

2008 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest

“Breaking Barriers”

Indigo Trigg-Hauger – Third Place

## Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

August 28, 1963 was the day Martin Luther King Jr. gave his speech to Washington about a dream he had that, “one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.” It seemed impossible at the time that his dream, the dream of many other people, black and white, could be achieved. But it was, and ever since then we have been a better nation, becoming better every day.

Fifty-four years later, we have all just been part of an election that people are calling the most historic of our time. Whether you voted for Obama, McCain, another candidate, or not at all, we have all been aware of this happening, we all have seen it.

The outcome of this election, a tremendous outcome of change, is that Barack Obama will be the next president of the United States of America. It is, in part, due to the change Dr. King helped to foster, that we can even comprehend Obama as our next president.

I think, though, that we have to look at other events to see what people know as change.

One great change was in Washington, the speech that has, to some people, defined him. A quarter of a million people marched to hear not only his speech, but dozens of others. They stood in the heat that day, and listened and made a difference just by standing there. They were enacting change just by being there.

Another quarter of a million people stood and watched as another man gave his acceptance speech on November 4, 2008. That was a change that we won't forget easily.

Who made the change, though? Who really broke the barriers? Was it the sole effort of Dr. King that helped change for the better the rights of African Americans? Or was it also the combined efforts of the many people that listened and followed, and even the ones who didn't? What about every person who stood near the Lincoln Memorial that day in Washington and lent their voices to the cause? They made the change too.

One person can't make a great change just by themselves. They can start the change, help it grow, guide it along and nurture it, but to make it truly strong, so that it can stand on its own two feet without them, they need supports, people to feed the change. They need more than just themselves to sustain it, because if they did it would sap their own strength. One person alone is how a change can be started, but not how it should be continued.

But what did Dr. King accomplish? What was it that he really contributed to the civil rights movement? He made the public notice. They couldn't ignore him when people flocked from all over to hear what he would say. He certainly made the public notice when he led the Montgomery bus boycott, for instance, spurred by the arrests of Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks, which lasted for 385 days and enraged people to the point that his house was bombed. But in the end, racial segregation was ended in Montgomery, a victory for all who had walked, carpooled and ridden donkeys instead of taking the buses that they relied on so much.

He also incited notice when he, along with several other civil rights activists, formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) which was involved in many protests and demonstrations such as the Albany Movement, a movement that he was arrested during, and was told that he would spend forty-five days in jail, or pay a \$178 fine. He chose jail.

What was most remarkable about everything he was a part of, though, was that he made people notice not by violence or destruction like so many others in a fashion that still goes on today, but by his absolute non-violence, utilized by Gandhi also, to make people become aware.

People involved in non-violent protests and demonstrations learned to control anger and how to protect themselves. They were absolutely in control, and they didn't need weapons or violence. That was a huge barrier that Dr. King demolished, getting attention by peace. I only wish, along with others I'm sure, that in today's brutal and war-filled world that the ones who want to have their voices heard could follow Martin Luther King's path and make their causes heard through peace like this great man who showed us his change and his difference that succeeded.

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